



2 of 250 DOCUMENTS

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HEADLINE: Mote to resign as U-Md. president in August

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BODY:

C.D. Mote Jr., who has led the University of Maryland on a 12-year journey into the top tier of public universities, will resign in August, he said Monday, confident that "the place is in good shape" and that it is time for someone else to take charge.

In a single generation, U-Md. has gone from being a safety school to the highest level of public higher education, not far behind the University of Virginia and the University of California at Berkeley in academic pedigree. Mote didn't begin the transformation, colleagues said, but he completed it.

"I don't think the university could have had a better president for these 12 years," said Clifford Kendall, chairman of the Board of Regents of the University System of Maryland. "He's moved it more dramatically than I can imagine anyone else could have moved it."

Mote, 73, will take a one-year leave and then return to the university to participate "in any way that is helpful to the campus," he said in an e-mail to the university community. He will retain his status as an engineering professor.

In an interview, the Berkeley-educated scholar said that his chief accomplishment at Maryland might have been "to create an expectation of excellence. . . . That's the most important thing you can do. We have been working on that night

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and day since I came, and I think people have that now."

Colleagues said he has also created the reality of excellence. Matriculating U-Md. students have never had higher grades or SAT scores, and freshman admission is at its most competitive level. The average grade-point average of this year's incoming class was 3.93, half a point higher than 12 years ago. Freshman applications have nearly doubled during Mote's tenure.

Mote hired the university's first Nobel laureate. The school's rank in U.S. News & World Report among public research universities has risen from 30th in 1998 to 18th this year. And research funding has more than doubled and exceeds \$500 million annually.

Mote also led the two largest fundraising campaigns in U-Md. history and established the university's first independent foundation and governing board.

"It's a badge of honor now to get admitted to College Park," said William E. Kirwan, chancellor of the University System of Maryland and Mote's predecessor as president.

"Students here feel like they're at a world-class institution," said Steve Glickman, 21, student body president.

The university has not been without controversy during Mote's tenure.

Three months ago, several hundred students marched to the administration building to protest the firing of the school's popular diversity officer and the dwindling number of black students. The screening of a pornographic film last spring bruised relations between the school and some state lawmakers. And even with tuition frozen, students chafed at diminished services and rising fees.

But those skirmishes seldom touched Mote.

"He hasn't really had problems with students in the last few years," Glickman said.

The College Park campus was abuzz Monday over Mote's departure, which appeared to have no external cause. Mote said that he had simply been in the job long enough and that 12 years "is actually longer than what I thought was a long time."

"The place is in good shape," he said. "It has a spirit that I think is unstoppable." He said, too, that it would be nice to go out on top: "You always want to leave the party before it's over."

Tough times are ahead for Maryland's higher education system, which will abandon a four-year tuition freeze this year with a 3 percent increase for in-state students. But the flagship university's academic currency has never been higher.

Kirwan, who started on the Maryland math faculty in 1964, recalled an era when "admissions officers would go out to high schools and admit students on the spot." State leaders resolved in the 1980s that Maryland had enough public universities and that U-Md. could afford to trade quantity for quality. They organized a university system and designated U-Md. the flagship, shrinking the freshman class to raise the caliber of instruction.

Kirwan organized a new generation of rigorous programs, including a restructured honors program, to rival competitors such as the private Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and to make the large university feel smaller. Dwindling state funds in the 1990s drove Kirwan out.

Mote, a mechanical engineer who had become vice chancellor at Berkeley in a three-decade career, was hired for his scholarly credentials and fundraising prowess. He has excelled as a fundraiser at Maryland, leading a \$1 billion Great Expectations campaign. He has also overseen an unparalleled boom in construction that has included a

performing arts center, engineering building, sports facility and alumni center.

And Mote has taken advantage of what he calls the "unfair advantage" of proximity to Washington, building a 130-acre research park and an international business incubator and positioning the university as a leader in the burgeoning field of national security.

"Certainly, the university's stature across the board has grown tremendously," said Thomas Cohen, a U-Md. physics professor. "It used to be that there were a few strong departments. And now there are many, many strong departments and relatively few weak ones."

Under Mote, the university has attained a stature in its community that few other universities can match, colleagues said, one that is on a par with flagships in North Carolina and Texas.

Fourteen national championships in intercollegiate sports have helped. But Mote also built the Terrapin brand with Maryland Day, an annual community outreach event that draws more than 75,000 people.

Two-thirds of freshman seats are reserved for Marylanders, and although admission is no longer a sure bet, the school has not suffered the same community backlash as U-Va. for rejecting local applicants.

"It's still a university that the people see as theirs," said David Shulenburg, vice president of academic affairs at the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities.

Mote said that the timing of his announcement gives the school time to complete a thorough search for his replacement. Kendall, the board chairman, said Mote's accomplishments will make it easier to recruit capable candidates.

"I would assume that this would be one of the premier, sought-after jobs in the country," he said. "It's so much easier to keep going when you have something good."

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